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SUBJECT: UNHCR FINDS GREECE LACKING IN PROTECTION OF  
MIGRANT MINORS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) On June 18, PolOff and PolAssistant attended a press conference hosted by the Greek Chapter of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to commemorate World Refugee Day 2008 and to release a new study concerning separated children seeking asylum in Greece. All participants at the conference and the Head of the local UNHCR office in Greece urged the GOG to take steps to provide greater protection to illegal immigrant unaccompanied minors.

¶2. (SBU) Georgia Dimitropoulou, one of two UNHCR researchers who conducted the study, said that while there were no official figures for how many unaccompanied minors entered Greece illegally each year, she estimated the number of separated children to be in the hundreds. George Tsarbopoulos, Head of the local UNHCR office in Greece urged the GOG to expedite asylum applications of unaccompanied minors and to create new facilities to house them (according to the study, existing structures can only host up to 150 children). The local UNHCR also asked Athens to proceed with measures that include the safe entry of separated children to Greek territory, to provide minors with interpreters and legal assistance, and to provide lodging in the reception centers until the age of 18. Finally, UNHCR asked GOG officials to adopt an immigration policy that would give permanent residence, by granting asylum status, to unaccompanied minors. Tsarbopoulos said Greece was particularly reluctant to grant asylum status, with only eight of the 20,962 applications made to the state in 2007 approved. After appeals, a further 132 applications were accepted.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: All the measures suggested by the local UNHCR to GOG are derived from Greece's international obligations, such as the respect of the rights of children and refugees as provided by the International Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989, and the International Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951. Local and international human rights organizations agree that Greece does not adequately protect unaccompanied children. According to human rights activists accounts, they have found unaccompanied children wandering around in illegal immigrant ad hoc camps in Patras and other cities. They also added that separated children have been found in adult detention centers. End Comment.

SPECKHARD